

WANDERERS ARE BACK IN THE HUNT

WYCOMBE Wanderers produced a team performance of five star quality on Tuesday evening to avenge their defeat at Hendon in Division One of the Rothmans Isthmian League. This followed their 5-2 triumph on Saturday and on this form, the Blues can haul themselves right back into contention for the championship.

Earlier this season, Wanderers struggled to match their own standards of previous years and dropped points all too regularly. But after their last two league performances, it must be said they look a totally different combination. This victory over Hendon was earned by outstanding teamwork and high class football played at speed.

One of the main reasons for this resurgence of form is the improvement up front. Both Dylan Evans and Geoff Anthony have made giant strides recently and present a totally different picture to their early season performances. Evans was on the target again on Tuesday and his display was only marred by a harsh booking. Wycombe's second this season, in the closing stages. Anthony has now shrugged off an old leg injury and looks a yard faster.

With goals now coming regularly — Wycombe have now scored nine goals in two matches — much of the

pressure has been taken off the midfield men. Against Hendon they benefited accordingly. All three, with Mick Holifield outstanding, had more time to come forward and this gave Hendon countless problems. The defence, minus injured skipper John Delaney, also performed consistently with Paul Birdseye hardly putting a foot wrong all night. Birdseye seems to be the complete player now. His slight weakness in the air has been eliminated and in my view, he would walk into many Football League sides.

As for Hendon, who had lost only twice previously, they could have few arguments about the result. As always, they played their own brand of attacking football but they must be worried about their defence. Alan Phillips, last year's Wycombe captain, had something of a nightmare return to his former club and the back four were repeatedly stretched by Wycombe's intelligent use of the through ball.

RARE ACCURACY

It was this play that brought their downfall. Stringing passes together with rare accuracy and at top speed, Wanderers exposed large gaps in the visitors rearward.

Wycombe welcomed back goalkeeper John Maskell after a three match absence due to an operation while Dave Bullock, stand-in goalkeeper, took over

at centre back for Delaney. Dave struggled early on against the skills of Johnny Baker but improved as the match progressed.

It took only seven minutes for the Blues to go ahead — a goal tailor made by Mick Holifield. Anthony gave him the ball on the left side and bursting past a defender in characteristic style, he powered a shot against the crossbar. Phillips raced back but as the ball came down it struck him on the thigh and rolled over the line.

Soon afterwards, Tony Horseman ran onto Terry Reardon's 40 yard through ball and when inside the box, was tackled strongly from behind. In such a situation many players would have taken a 'dive'. Not Horseman. He carried on and spurned the chance of a possible penalty by keeping his feet and taking the ball on before Hendon were able to clear.

At this stage, Hendon had little to offer up front despite the efforts of Baker. But they snatched a shock equaliser with 14 minutes gone. Bobby Childs broke through on the edge of the box and drilled in a shot which Maskell couldn't hold and Rod Haider pounced to steer the ball home. A minute later, Maskell did well to take a stinging free kick from Dave Metchick.

For a time, the equaliser took the life out of Wycombe. Pass-

ing became ragged until Holifield produced a fine effort in the 23rd minute. Gary Hand, another ex-Wycombe defender, won two 50-50 tackles before losing out to Reardon whose cross was headed just over by Holifield. Reardon's distribution in the first half was superb and with Dave Alexander also working well, it came as no surprise when the Blues regained their lead after 38 minutes.

The goal confirmed the steady improvement of Dylan Evans in recent weeks. When the Wycombe centre forward picked up Phillip's poor header he resisted a challenge from the Hendon centre half and then drove past keeper Dalrymple, and it emphasised his new confidence in front of goal.

Much the same could be said of Anthony, who brought two good saves from Dalrymple with powerful shots before half time. Anthony's willingness to shoot gave the home attack new dimensions while presenting their opponents with an additional headache.

The second half was only three minutes old when Wanderers went into a 3-1 lead with another fine goal, this time from Alexander. Dalrymple started the trouble for Hendon when he mis-punched Birdseye's deep cross and as the ball came out to 'Alex' on the edge of the box, he fired a low shot perfectly into the net.

With three goals under their belts, Wycombe played some delightful football, making Hendon look an ordinary side rather than a club in second place in the table. But Hendon are not a team to take lightly and with a talented front three, they are always dangerous. They demonstrated that fact by pulling back a further goal in the 67th minute. Maskell pushed away a swerving drive from Tony Field for a corner. Metchick took the flag kick and sent to Baker at the near post. A neat flick with the head and Hendon were back in the match.

It was Wycombe, however, who were producing the greater number of chances and their new confidence went close and although Hendon pressed strongly for a time, Wanderers presented a new threat with fast breaks from defence.

Once again Horseman skimmed a shot just over the bar after breaking down the middle. Hendon's chief weakness throughout the match.

With only two minutes left, Evans was booked by referee Drewe. Mr. Drewe had made some puzzling decisions during the match and often ignored his linesmen. It seemed harsh to take Evans' name when the Wycombe striker failed to retreat 10 yards from a quick Hendon free kick but one innocuous comment to the official was enough to earn a booking. It was Wycombe's second this season and only their fourth in three seasons of Rothmans sponsorship.

Although only two minutes of the match remained, Holifield found time to put the result beyond any doubt with a truly brilliant individual effort in the 89th minute. Faced by two defenders on the edge of the box, he took the ball left and then curled an unstoppable shot into the far corner of the net past the helpless goalkeeper. The goal capped an excellent individual display by Holifield who, on form like this, looks a world beater.

Wanderers have every reason to feel proud after this result which gave every one of the near 2,000 spectators their best value of the season so far. If they can maintain this quality of performance, they will soon be hard on the heels of Enfield and Co. at the top of the table.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, K. Hand, D. Bullock, R. Eaton, D. Alexander, T. Reardon, M. Holifield, A. Horseman, D. Evans, G. Anthony (sub A. Price 89 mins).

HENDON: M. Dalrymple, J. Field, S. Ragan, A. Phillips, G. Hand, A. Field, D. Metchick, R. Haider, R. Childs, J. Baker, A. Amos (sub S. Jeffries 53 mins).

Referee: P. Drewe (Upminster).

Half-time: 2-1. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Phillips o.g. (7), Evans (38), Alexander (48), Holifield (89).

Hendon — Haider (14), Baker (86).

Official paying attendance: 1,444.

Approx total attendance: 1800.